

The American RECORD GUIDE



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EDITED BY PETER HUGH REED
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Editorial Notes

Mr. Walsh's article last month recalled many experiences with the phonograph in the acoustic era. It awoke so many pleasant and unpleasant memories that we found ourselves turning back the clock and recalling some of our own adventures. His mention of the Aeolian-Vocalion phonograph brought to mind the experiences we had with this machine made for reproduction of the old-time records. Until the Aeolian-Vocalion came along we used a Victrola, but upon acquiring the former instrument when it was placed on the market in 1916, we encountered what seemed to us a revolutionary reproduction for its time. The so-called "graduola", a device for reducing the tone, soon proved to be a gadget which supplied an advertising point of sales, but its value in our estimation, was nil. It permitted one to bring a "squeezing" shutter into play at the narrow opening of the metal horn and succeeded only in muffling tone. Hence, we, along with many others who used this machine, forgot about the "graduola" and enjoyed the clear, forward sound of the reproduction. The metal chamber of the Aeolian-Vocalion was a decided feature in its favor; it reproduced music far more clearly and cleanly than any other phonograph of those days, and that includes the Edison machine.

Old-timers will perhaps be interested in our reminiscences, while younger readers may be amused at the efforts of one musical listener who took the phonograph seriously even in its infancy. The English went in for all sorts of gadgets to improve the early phonographs and most of us who took the instrument seriously bought these gadgets. There were various kinds of extraneous sound-boxes, like the one with the tortoiseshell diaphragm, which improved the re-

production considerably by reducing the blasting that prevailed on so many mica diaphragms. This blasting of the sound-box was one of the bane of the old phonograph and a lot of recordings by famous singers, which today command a high price, were not popular in the old days because their recordings blasted on the machines of the time. It was our experience that Columbia celebrity recordings were among the most difficult to reproduce and such vocally gifted artists as Celestina Boninsegna and Eugenia Burzio were not appreciated in the acoustic era in this country because their records reproduced so badly on the old machines. Perhaps record material had something to do with this, but that is a phase of the subject upon which we have no specific information.

The advent of the Aeolian-Vocalion allowed the record buyer to acquire all kinds and makes of records, because it had a sound-box which could be adjusted to play either lateral or hill-and-dale recordings. Thus, when we acquired this machine we were able to buy Edison records and enjoy them. It should be noted that Edison recordings were singularly free from blasts, but they had a most annoying surface noise. Despite Edison's advertisements and claims to "amazing realism" of tone, the finest recordings we ever heard in the old days were a series of over-sized Pathés we imported from Paris. Pathé in the old days made records fourteen inches in diameter which contained not more than four minutes of music to a side. Whether it was the width of the groove or the manner of recording that enhanced the "realism" of these discs we do not know. Suffice it to say, the finest and most natural sounding reproduction of the orchestra was obtained in the acoustic era, in our opinion, from these over-sized Pathés. And the voice from them was every bit as clear and as realistic as from Edison's so-called "recreations".

In all the writings about old recordings and the re-issues and re-recordings of them no effort has been made, to the best of our knowledge, to revive interest in the material that was once available on what we call the over-sized Pathé discs. There were outstanding performances, if memory serves us well, by many famous French singers, early Muratore recordings and many by the

famous Belgian baritone Jean Noté (1860-1922). The orchestral discs, of course, would have no interest today, for, as fine as they were in their time, they were, like all acoustic recordings, deficient in bass. Yet, in their day, they were fuller and richer in sound than any other recordings, and provided a truly thrilling experience for those of us who owned them. The Pathé claim that its records could be played a thousand times without wear was not so far-fetched as some might wish to believe; we had a series of orchestral discs which were played hundreds of times for the many that came to our studio and the wear on them seemed negligible. But, for that matter, the Edison discs we owned held up equally well in repeated playings.

When Aeolian-Vocalion brought out its hill-and-dale records, the quality of reproduction was as good, in our estimation, as in the Edison ones. Some of the best records made by the great soprano, Rosa Raisa, were issued between 1916 and 1920 by Aeolian-Vocalion. Later efforts to dub the hill-and-dale into lateral-cut records destroyed some of the quality of the originals. And that is a point that reminds us that many modern dubbings of old hill-and-dale cut discs have similarly suffered from a loss of quality. The existent recordings of the noted French tenor Muratore lack the realistic beauty of tone of the original Pathés.

Needles were as great a source of phonographic controversy in the old days as they are in our times. In the case of the hill-and-dale recordings, a jewel point was deemed essential, but some of us found that the excessive surface noise which resulted from the employment of a jewel point could be eliminated by using a fibre or other non-metallic needle on Edison and Pathé discs. And, believe it or not, the reproduction was quite as good, and in some cases better. The only trouble with the non-metallic needle was it did not always satisfactorily retain its point throughout all records. One of the approved English needles of the latter part of the acoustic era was the Edison Bell needle. We do not know how the noted inventor's name got attached to this needle, but if we are not mistaken the Edison Bell Co. in England had something to do with the American Edison Co. The Edison Bell

(Continued on page 320)



Ch. Kemble and
Miss Smithson in
Romeo and Juliet—
Paris 1827.

ROMEO AND JULIET IN MUSIC

★ ★ A RAMBLING DISCOURSE ★ ★

By Peter Hugh Reed

The English critic, Edward Sackville-West, in *The New Statesman and Nation*, recently made some recommendations to the record companies of "a number of fine works the lack of which makes a nasty hole in the repertoire of recorded classics", among which was cited Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet*. No doubt, he contended, an integral recording of this symphony is out of the question; however, "I have not been able to understand why, although the *Tristesse* (*Romeo's Reverie*) and *Fête* and the *Queen Mab Scherzo* have been issued twice, the *Love Scene*, which is the core of the symphony and contains its best music, continues to be neglected". Having recently acquired some recordings, taken from the air, of Toscanini's magical interpretations of the *Reverie* and *Fête*, the *Queen Mab Scherzo* and the *Love Scene*, I concur with Mr. Sackville-West, and

only hope that this music—which has afforded me so much pleasure—will someday be issued on commercial records so that many others can enjoy it too.

A number of years ago, our friend Neville d'Esterre wrote an article on the music inspired by Shakespeare's play. Some of his illuminating comments, and the issue of the Russian-made recording of the *Second Suite* from Prokofieff's ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*, prompted this discourse.

Like others, d'Esterre thinks that the merits of the Berlioz symphony "are centered in the two middle movements, the *Queen Mab Scherzo* (a brilliant *tour de force*), which has inspired many French composers, and the adorable *Love Scene*". He, too, laments that the latter is missing from records.

In his *Essays in Musical Analysis* (Vol.

IV), Tovey writes at length on this one movement. Apparently he played it often in his concerts with the Reid Orchestra at Edinburgh, rightfully feeling that it stood on its own as a tone poem. Like others, he contends that the *Scherzo* and the *Love Scene* have little to gain, "and much to lose, by their inclusion in the incoherent and unwieldy scheme of the whole" work. Berlioz's symphony is, in its entirety, badly inflated and sadly lacking in homogeneity. As a matter of fact, it is hardly a symphony in the true sense of the word; it is rather a combination of symphony, opera, and oratorio. In several sections, he employs soloists and a chorus, which seem out of place. In the long finale, for example, he uses the chorus and a bass soloist, as Friar Laurence, whose utterances have been aptly described as "empty pomposities". The three movements cited above, however, are of true symphonic character and deserving of the solicitous attention that Toscanini gave them in a recent radio performance.

A Recorded Excerpt

The *Reverie* and *Fête* (Part II of the work) was chosen by Percy A. Scholes as an example of romantic program music for Vol. IV of his *Columbia History of Music*. The music is well played by the late Sir Hamilton Harty and the London Philharmonic Orchestra (discs DB1230/31). An older recording, less desirable, dating from around 1930, played by the late Gabriel Pierné and the Colonne Concerts Orchestra was once available on domestic Decca discs (Nos. 25029/25550). This section of the symphony, while not as persuasively poetic as the *Love Scene*, nonetheless has its admirable qualities. At first, Romeo is depicted alone, lost in reveries or perhaps a premonition of tragedy before entering the ballroom of the Capulets. The latter part of the movement is a musical picture of the Capulet Fête. Scholes quotes three passages from Shakespeare which he feels offer "a description more closely corresponding" to this musical scene in its entirety. The first, from Act I, Scene 4, is the final speech of Romeo in which he says:

" my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels."

The second, from Act I, Scene 5, is Romeo's remarks on first beholding Juliet, and the third, from the same scene, is Capulet's welcome to the guests and his somewhat ribald bid to merriment. If Berlioz did not designate these passages from Shakespeare, he might well have, for they suggest his programmatic intent. There is a languishing, rhapsodic quality to the passage depicting Romeo's reverie, wherein Berlioz's use of chromatic harmonies adds a caressing quality to the music. But, although there is a sparkling gaiety to the *Fête*, I fail to find it Italian in spirit—it seems more suggestive of a festive Parisian scene. One admires the ingenuity of the composer in building this movement; a hint of the festivity is given before the music depicting Romeo's supposed first sight of Juliet—thus the linking together of the *Reverie* and *Fête*, two completely different moods, is accomplished convincingly.

The "Love Scene"

The exquisitely refined *Love Scene* is a truly inspired counterpart in music of the balcony scene from Shakespeare's play. It begins with a murmuring, contemplative passages for the strings, which suggests an atmosphere of nocturnal serenity. The concert version omits the chorus, supposed to be the Capulet youths returning from the fête, a bit of theatrical realism which is best left out. It carries over from the slow introduction into the music which immediately follows the choral section, which opens "with a rustling theme in the cellos, above which sighing fragments of melody float for some time" (Tovey). The music builds up to an impassioned intensity and then fades out. One should read Tovey on this music; for he too links it to the poetry of Shakespeare, although he is less audacious in this respect than Scholes. But Tovey and Scholes are not the only ones to succumb to this temptation, for the late Lawrence Gilman said of the finale, it "is very quiet. . . as if the music remembered that 'all this is but a dream, too flattering sweet to be substantial' ". All these men, of course, recognized Berlioz for what he was, a "romantic realist", and undoubtedly they could not resist poetic allusions in describing his music. But words are not needed to convince us of the quality of the *Love Scene*; it is subtly poetic music,

made eloquent by Berlioz's gift for beautiful orchestration—one of the finest, if not "the finest piece of music that ever came out of Gaul", as J. S. Elliot contends in his book on the composer. All of which explains why I hope Toscanini will record it.

Berlioz has told us how he witnessed at the Odéon in 1827 a performance of Juliet by the Irish actress, Harriet Constance Smithson, and how it affected him emotionally, though he "did not know then a syllable of English" and only "dimly discerned" Shakespeare through the misty medium of a French translation. "This sudden and unexpected revelation of Shakespeare," he tells us, "overwhelmed me. The lightning-flash of his genius revealed the whole heaven of art to me, illuminating its remotest depths in a single flash. I recognized the meaning of real grandeur, real beauty, and real dramatic truth. . . ." After that performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, the *Illustrated London News* quoted the composer as saying: "I will marry that woman! and I will write my greatest symphony on that play!" Though Berlioz denies he made this statement, he does not hesitate to say in his *Memoirs*, "I did both".

Composer and Poet

Berlioz also has told us that he "lived ardently" with the spirit of Shakespeare while composing his symphony. Yet, as Tovey says, "it is idle to expect that he will be faithful to Shakespeare when he cannot attend to his own musical and illustrative scheme". But the composer has explained this in his *Memoirs*. "It is far more difficult for a Frenchman to sound the depths of Shakespeare's style than it is for an Englishman to appreciate the subtlety and originality of Molière or La Fontaine." Berlioz was, in fact, too strong an individualist to permit the poetic scheme of a dramatist, English or French, to hamper his ideas or musical intentions, even though he borrowed the dramatist's material and title. And, by and large, it has been the same way with all others who have been drawn to write music around the English Bard's play.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has been a subject to which composers have been drawn for at least two centuries. There are, however, only three versions in music which are well known today to the American public:



Jean De Reszke as Romeo—circa 1890

the Gounod opera, the symphony of Berlioz, and the fantasy-overture by Tchaikovsky. Two other works, nonetheless, deserve to be better known, the opera *Giulietta e Romeo*, by the contemporary Italian composer, Riccardo Zandonai, and the ballet music of Prokofieff. Zandonai's opera is said by some authorities to be based on Shakespeare's play, but in Italy I was given to understand that his libretto was based on the original tale of Bandello. Shakespeare is said to have founded his drama on a rhymed account of the tragedy by an English writer of the early part of the 16 century, Arthur Broke. The latter derived his tale from a French writer, who in turn took it from Bandello. So, it will be noted, the story of the young lovers travelled across Europe, and, as in other cases, acquired new dramatic twists. Bandello drew his tale from life, for the two noble families of 14th-century Verona, the Capuletti and Montecchi, actually lived, and their feud brought about the tragical love of their two children.

Certainly the ill-starred lovers of Verona

are appealing figures to the imagination of most peoples. Famous lovers of myth or history have been subjects for operas ever since the earliest operatic composers, Caccini, Peri, and Monteverdi wrote their scores based on the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice. The potency of love as a theme has dominated literature as well as the stage from time immemorial, and always will. "To enlarge or illustrate this power and effect of love is to set a candle in the sun," as Robert Burton said in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*. But there are love stories that lend themselves better to the stage than that of Romeo and Juliet. The love story for successful dramatic treatment usually requires a development of its main characters. In Shakespeare's play, it is the events that develop rather than the characters. That this drama is not ideal material for an opera does not seem, however, to have concerned the composers who have been drawn to it.

Operas Based on the Play

Some nine operas based on Shakespeare's play have been produced since the latter part of the 18th century. The Bohemian composer, Georg Benda (1722-1795), wrote the only German version. First produced in 1777, his opera held the German stage for a long period. Among the most successful and most widely known scores are those written by Nicola Vaccai (1790-1848), a prolific Italian opera composer, and by Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835). Vaccai's opera was first produced in 1825; Bellini's in 1830. With a complete disregard of other men's rights that is incomprehensible to us but characteristic of earlier times, Bellini used the same libretto as Vaccai, though he did prevail upon the librettist, F. Romani, to make some slight alterations. Both of these operas were full of inconsistencies of their own and of their time: the part of Romeo, for example, in the Bellini work was given to a woman. From 1832 onward, Bellini's opera was given, oddly enough, with the last act from Vaccai's score substituted for his own. Of the two works, Bellini's held the stage the longer; it was given throughout Europe until 1862, and was revived in Italy as late as 1934.

The Gounod opera came in 1867, and unquestionably displaced the works of his predecessors. It has held the stage the longest

of any. Mr. d'Esterre says "it is excellent Gounod no doubt—certain authorities rate it higher than *Faust*—but it is anything but excellent Shakespeare. With what fidelity to the sense and spirit of the original a Shakespeare tragedy or comedy may be treated in operatic form was well demonstrated by Verdi in *Otello* and *Falstaff*. 'Never was a story of more woe than that of Romeo and Juliet', but Gounod manages to conceal the woeful occasion most effectively by dressing it up, as it were, in fashionable clothes, and shaping it to the peculiar artistic appetites of popular prima donnas and heroic tenors. He goes so far as to introduce Juliet to the audience with a bravura waltz-song—surely one of the most lamentable solecisms in the whole range of music! Yet, how typical of Gounod: the same worthy gentleman who once conceived the happy notion of decorating Bach's first *Prelude* from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* with a bit of the choicest meditative banality based upon its harmonic developments: a feat which no other master ever was tempted to emulate. The Berlioz *Symphony*, with all its faults, is at all events an attempt to express in music something of the true spirit of Shakespeare's tragic poem. The Gounod opera, with all its merits, is merely a piratical appropriation of the bare outline of the Shakespeare tragedy for the thoroughly non-Shakespearean purposes of fashionable grand opera."

Zandonai's Opera

Zandonai, in his *Giulietta e Romeo*—as I have already noted—is said to have had his librettist, Arturo Rossato, return to the old Italian tale. There are, of course, parallels between his libretto and Shakespeare's drama, but his story is more concisely told, and the scenes cut down to four. The lovers are first introduced in the balcony scene in a duet of impassioned lyricism; there is no tenor cavatina or bravura waltz-song. The last scene is, of course, the tomb scene, but it is not fashioned on Shakespeare's dramatic action, but follows a pattern similar to that of the Gounod finale. There is what might be termed an aria for Romeo, in which he pours out his grief and anguish over the body of Juliet and at the end drinks the poison. There follows Juliet's awakening and the long duet, in which the poisoned Romeo defies the laws of nature,

Zandonai's music redeems the incongruity of the operatic situation; it is both poetically ardent and fervently dramatic, albeit in the true Italian manner. But Zandonai's opera makes for good theatre, despite the fact that there is no development of character but only of events. He knows how to present a dramatic situation and his comprehension of the relationship between poetry and music is particularly praiseworthy. Moreover, he shows unusual ability in handling his orchestra. His score is modern in the same sense that Montemezzi's *L'Amore dei tre re* is. It is not broken up into arias or concerted pieces; the music flows with the poetic sequence and he allows no pauses for applause. Since the Zandonai opera has long held a conspicuous place in Italian opera houses, and has been produced with success in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, it is surprising that in its quarter of a century of existence it has not been given in this country. The one performance I heard in Rome impressed me greatly; it was a much better opera than the Gounod one.

Some Recordings

Three excerpts from Zandonai's score have found their way to records: the *Torch Dance* (Act II) and the *Ride of Romeo* (Act III) (La Scala Orchestra, conducted by Vincenzo Bellezza—Italian H.M.V. early electric disc S10141), and Romeo's air, *Giulietta son io* (Act III—Tomb Scene) (Michele Fleta—acoustic disc Victor 74775 or H. M. V. DB524). The orchestral excerpts emerge less successfully from the opera house; particularly is this true of the *Ride of Romeo*. This intermezzo comes between the two scenes that form the last act. In the former, Romeo at Mantua hears of Juliet's supposed death, and, against the advice of his servant, decides to ride back immediately to Verona. His ride is depicted in the music, which is singularly successful theatre music when heard in the opera house with the chorus echoing the anguished cries of Romeo. In the concert hall, the chorus is omitted and much of the dramatic thrust of the music weakened. The *Torch Dance* also loses without its vocal complements. The touching air of Romeo is one of Fleta's best records, but one regrets it was not accomplished electrically since the colorful orchestral background is not done justice to in the acoustic



Lucien Muratore as Romeo—1917

reproduction.

To return to the Gounod *Romeo and Juliet*, it is unfortunate that the composer's *Faust* overshadows this score. In passing, it should be noted that in the latter score he maltreated Goethe as much as he did Shakespeare in the former. But the melodic charm of *Faust* was not duplicated in *Romeo and Juliet*. The love-scenes, which should have been the finest parts, do not attain the same high level of inspiration as those in *Faust*. Sentiment rather than passion prevails in the balcony scene, and the continued use of a waltz rhythm in climactic passages defeats the intent of ardor. Although the scene in Juliet's chamber has been called "a finely dramatic piece of composition", one ranking "with the best products of its writer's imagination" (W. J. Henderson), his use of waltz rhythm here vitiates the drama. It is absurd to hear Romeo's anxious warning of the approach of day tossed off in

three-quarter time. At the end of the duel scene, Romeo is given a heroic declamation that inevitably earns a good tenor a round of applause; it is effective theatre music. The final duet in the tomb is an all-around better piece of dramatic writing, in my estimation. It is here that we find the most inspired pages in the score—the all too short air of Romeo, *Console toi, pauvre ami*. It is curious how Gounod at a climactic moment weakens the force of his drama. Near the end of Romeo's lengthy opening scene, when he sings of "dreading the tomb", The composer swings into waltz tempo with an incredible nonchalance.

In *Console toi, pauvre ami*, Romeo's anguish attains a maturity of expression not found elsewhere in the entire score, but the inspiration does not prevail, for what follows is certainly conventional opera material bordering on absurdity. It is regrettable, however, that the recording of the complete *Tomb Scene*, made by Georges Thill and Germaine Feraldy (Columbia discs 50362/63-D) is no longer available. Thill sang the music of Romeo with fine manly ardor, and Feraldy, though hardly more than a competent Juliet, nonetheless conveyed a certain girlish charm. One could have wished that Thill had done this scene with Galli-Curci or Bori.

The *Waltz-Song* of Juliet is a completely banal exhibition piece as well as an anomaly. I have retained two recordings of it, however, in my library. The one by Emma Eames (Victor acoustic disc 88011—1907), because of its adherence to tradition in style; Gounod taught her the part of Juliet and she sings the music exactly as he wrote it. The other is a modern version by Eide Norena (once available on Victor disc 14742).

There is a charming "conversational duet" from the first act, when the lovers first speak—*Ange adorable, ma main coupable*. This was once recorded by Geraldine Farrar and Edmond Clement (Victor disc 89113 or 8020). Farrar and Clement have rendered this duet with such ingratiating artistry that it matters not that the orchestral accompaniment is poor, for the voices are reproduced faithfully and they blend beautifully. I have never heard any two singers who quite succeeded in effacing the memory of those artists in this music. Romeo's impassioned and sentimental cavatina, *Ah! leve toi, soleil*, falls far short of Faust's aria, *Salut! demeure*. Again the three-quarter time ill serves the composer's intentions. Of all the recordings of this aria, the old acoustic version of Lucien Muratore appeals to me the most. Originally made on a Pathé hill-and-dale disc, it was re-recorded on a lateral-cut record and issued once by the International Record Collectors Club. Muratore was a famous Romeo; there are those who contend he was more thrilling in the part than Gounod's avowed favorite Romeo—Jean De Reszke. His sensuous and refined artistry is, to be sure, only partly mirrored in the recording but it cannot fail to recall to those who were fortunate enough to have heard him in his notable performances of Romeo in the opera house. Of modern versions, I would plump for that of Georges Thill (French Columbia disc L-1985), appreciable for that manly ardor of which I have already spoken. As to the balance of the opera, which was once recorded in its entirety on acoustic Pathé discs prior to World War I, I can forego its projection from records. What actually exists is far from satisfactory.

(To be continued)





The School of St. Thomas Church at Leipzig where Bach taught.

PERSONAL PREFERENCES

By Stewart Matter

Mr. Matter, who tells us of his favorite recordings this month, is rounding out twelve years as record reviewer and member of the music staff of The Cleveland Plain Dealer.

An elderly gentleman once introduced himself as an avid collector of phonograph records. After outlining the contents of a most impressive library, he pressed upon me a warm invitation to visit him. The promise of hearing some unusual recordings of Slezak, Destinn, Sembrich, and others brought me around at the appointed time. But, what do you think? The man had no phonograph at all, and when I questioned him, he said: "Hear them? Why, isn't it enough to read the names printed on the labels?"

As this went on I found a lot of people quite of the same mind. They collected labels rather than records. I admit, I often sit with a score in hand and mentally hear for myself music that is not recorded, but I have never learned to read labels in a similar manner. Some people idolize an artist to such an extent that they will buy every disc with that artist's name on it, no matter of what quality. I know a man who buys every record containing even the tiniest scrap of Handel music, whether it is by the Debroy Somers Band or the Royal Choral Society or by Alec Templeton. He has gone so far as

to offer several popularized versions to be played at a religious gathering of an evening. There are strange people among record collectors, and one encounters many types. I can go farther and cite those who mix up artists and composers by quoting the lady who recently asked a record clerk for the Iturbi *Polonaise* played by Cornell Wilde. "No," she insisted, "There was no such person as Chopin involved." And there was the lady who asked for the Koussekowsky recording of the Berlitz *Carnival Overture*. Believe it or not, these things happened, and in each case, the person in question resented being put straight.

There are individuals who collect every operatic vocal recorded, duplicating arias as often as a dozen times by various singers. One will want only violin music because he played the violin when a boy. Another will want only complete operas, and will go to any expense to get them. But how few collectors there are of the art song or of chamber music, those musical forms that bring to the listener that rare sense of intimacy and personal delight.

It is difficult for me to say which recordings are my actual preferences. I find enjoyment in many composers, in varied forms, and in many performers. I have decided therefore to list those recordings which are seldom heard in the concert hall, but which stand as towering monuments in the annals of music, and from which I have derived many hours of pleasure. The great symphonies and concertos we hear often enough on the radio and in the concert hall. Many of the best operas and much of the recital literature come often enough to hand, but what of the great choral works, those which demand a chorus of decided proficiency, an orchestra which is not available except in metropolitan centers, and soloists of outstanding calibre? We do hear some of these great choral works in local surroundings but always with greatly lessened facilities. This past year, I have conducted in Los Angeles choral works of Brahms, Fauré, Bach, Handel, Franck and others, and while the chorus was good and the soloists praiseworthy, we had to do these works with organ. With all respect to a splendid organist, the substitution of this instrument for orchestra was much like marriage without benefit of clergy. The rehearsals required and the terrific cost of mounting such productions prohibit many performances of the big choral works.

A Word of Advice

At this point, a word of caution should be given the collector not to plunge into a certain recording just because someone told him it is the thing to buy. Because it produces a thrill in one person does not mean that it will arouse the same reaction in another. But it does mean that if a number of people react favorably and the work has stood the test of time, there is something in it for a new listener, even one who is prejudiced in advance against this kind of music. The spiritual exaltation of the Fauré *Requiem* seldom impresses all listeners the first time, but after repeated hearings you could not take it away. Mahler and Bruckner leave the person cold who has fed on a diet of Mozart and Beethoven, but the reactions to the former pair that I have seen in my own experience with those who have gone about their listening intelligently and

with an open mind and heart, have been startling.

Music has too long been looked on as merely an avenue of entertainment, but we must see much farther along the road of our development than that. It is a matter of study, of self-assimilation, of mental and emotional growth, just as is the study of literature, of science, of mathematics. Do we look upon the study of academic subjects as mere entertainment? If we do, we have stopped growing, we have halted our progress toward the infinite.

In the following listing the reader will notice that I do not always approve of the performance or the mechanical standard set in the recording itself. I lay stress on the music, that which has come from the composer, whose creative facility is to me of far more importance than the mouthpiece of interpretation and expression.

Bach: *Mass in B minor*; London Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Choral Society and soloists, directed by Albert Coates. Victor set 104.

May I say at the outset that I regard this as the greatest single score ever written. No other can match it in loftiness of conception or in mastery of execution. For this work alone, Bach may claim his rightful place as the "father of modern music". The performance, in my estimation, is superb, what with Elisabeth Schumann, Margaret Balfour, Walter Widdop and Friedrich Schorr as soloists and all forces united under the inspired baton of Albert Coates. Oddly enough, this recording, while 15 years old, bears up very well indeed.

Bach: *Passion According to Saint Matthew*; The Boston Symphony, Harvard Glee Club and Radcliffe Choral Society with soloists, direction of Serge Koussevitzky. Victor sets 411/412/413.

Here is a work on a still grander scale than the *B minor Mass*, but somehow not quite as cohesive. Nevertheless, it is a moving depiction of the passion experience, which to every Christian must ever be the basis of his belief. The soloists are not the best to be had, but the choral and instrumental lines are remarkably well done. It is in part the organ work of Carl Weinrich which raises the performance to a high level. The recording is excellent.

Beethoven: *Missa Solemnis*; The Boston Symphony, Harvard and Radcliffe Choral groups, direction of Serge Koussevitzky. Victor sets 758/759.

This is another heaven-storming score, the creation of a man often misunderstood. Biographers have woven such a veil (or should I say fog) of misunderstanding and imbecility that the true human qualities, the powerful spiritual values inherent in this music are hidden from our view. Some writers actually try to convince us that Beethoven's was the opposite nature, and some conductors and performers actually would have it so. Beethoven did not hew to the ecclesiastical text set out by the church and before you get into this, get acquainted with the text as Beethoven conceived it. The soloists in this performance are not too definitive, nor are the breaks between sides too adroitly managed, and E. Power Biggs is not the organist Carl Weinrich is. But, it is tremendous music!

Beethoven (arr. Weingartner): *Hammerklavier Sonata*, Opus 106; the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, direction of Felix Weingartner. Columbia set 153.

Now I know the purists will want to shoot me. But I ask them to show me a single pianist who can play this sonata satisfactorily all the way through. I have heard the biggest essay it, but the overwhelming power which Beethoven has outlined is possible only in the orchestra. And who should have been more capable of transcribing a piano score of Beethoven than Weingartner, and who could have been more solicitous of its final performance than he? Columbia should rightly reinstate this set in its catalogue and make something of it. This is music that must be heard, for what greater balm in this time of unrest than the slow movement of this sonata? No other score quite matches it in serenity and that peace which is of the gods.

Bruckner: *Mass No. 2 in E minor*; The Aachen Cathedral Choir, with Wind Players of the Berlin State Opera Orchestra, direction of Theodore Rehmann. Victor set 596.

While not as important in my estimation as his *Te Deum*, which has not been recorded, this mass of Bruckner is nonetheless highly

exalted music, performed here with remarkable finish and a deep sense of spirituality. The recording too is fine. If you have not heard this as yet, you have a treat in store for you.

Fauré: *Requiem*; Les Disciples de Massenet and the Montreal Festival Orchestra, direction of Wilfred Pelletier. Marcelle Denya and Mack Harrell, soloists. Victor set 844.

For utter simplicity and economy of means, yet with no sacrifice of profundity and definiteness of purpose, this Requiem Mass is paramount since the golden days of Palestrina. The performance here is as admirably straightforward as that by Les Chanteurs de Lyon on Columbia (set 354), but the soloists are so much superior and the recording so far in advance that I prefer this set. Still, if I could not get this set, I would not pass up the other.

Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde*; Charles Kullman, Kerstin Thorborg, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, direction of Bruno Walter. Columbia set 300.

Few musical scores in my experience have given me the reaction I received when I first heard this music. It is an idiom which will not fall too easily on the ears unless one has first been conditioned by Wagner, Strauss, and others. But once the idiom is established and the philosophy, so strange to western minds, of the Chinese poems (on which the work is built), it becomes a part of one's consciousness—a living, thrilling experience. The performance and the recording are splendid.

Mozart: *The Magic Flute*; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, soloists and chorus, direction of Sir Thomas Beecham. Victor sets 541/541.

One of the three most perfect operatic performances on records. With such names as Erna Berger, Tiana Lemnitz, Gerhard Huesch, Beecham, etc., what more can one ask?

Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier*; Soloists and Chorus, with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, direction of Robert Heger. Victor set 196.

This is, in my estimation, the second of the three finest operatic recordings we have.

Here is Lotte Lehmann, in her prime, Elisabeth Schumann, Maria Olszewska, Richard Mayr, and a line-up that is just about impossible to beat, and in this day and age of so much bad singing, impossible to equal. This is a sterling performance of an inspired score.

Wagner: *Die Meistersinger—Act III*; Soloists, with Chorus and Orchestra of the Dresden State Opera, direction of Karl Boehm. Victor Sets 537/538.

This completes my operatic trilogy. Nowhere in recorded literature is there a recording so completely satisfying, from end to end, either as a performance or as a recording. This is my favorite operatic choice, and the joy it has given me can be yours if you want it. Margarete Teschemacher, Torsten Ralf, and Hans Herman Nissen are singers to reckon with, but above all there is the splendid musicianship of Karl Boehm and the luscious sound of the Dresden State Opera Orchestra.

Verdi: *Requiem*; Soloists, with the Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera, Rome, direction of Tullio Serafin. Victor set 734.

Here is magnificent work, written by a composer whose respect for the great ideals of democracy laid down by the poet Manzoni prompted him to write this moving memorial to the poet's memory. With soloists of the calibre of Pinza, Gigli, Caniglia and Stignani, we have singing that is always a pleasure to hear. The only criticism I have is that Gigli forgets on occasion that he is not singing opera.

I should have liked to include many other works, smaller ones, such as the *Four Serious Songs* of Brahms, sung by Kipnis (Victor set 522), the profoundly moving *Kindertotenlieder* of Mahler, so beautifully sung by Heinrich Rehkemper (Polydor discs 66693-/95), the *Dichterliebe* of Schumann, by Charles Panzera and Alfred Cortot (Victor set 386), and some larger works of d'Indy, Chausson, Delius, Reger, more of Mahler and Bruckner, and the like. Some will ask, why only the one song group of Brahms? Well, he is so universal that we hear him a great deal and then too any collector will get

works of Brahms quite early into his library. Of course, if the *Requiem* were recorded, I should certainly have included it. But then, there are many other great works still awaiting permanency through recordings.

Editorial Notes

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needle, which survived until a few years ago, was a steel one that had been given a brass coating, and was advertised as usable a number of times. Today, that needle does not reproduce electrically recorded discs as well as modern steel and chromiums do. It filters decidedly.

We suppose some old-timers remember the "life belt", which Compton Mackenzie and his *Cramophone* introduced to the record-minded public in the early 'twenties. It was quite an elaborate gadget designed to allow the sound-box a freer and less rigid movement across the record and to lessen its weight. We owned one and got some fine results from it. The old mica diaphragm of the sound-box was always a source of trouble and many were the efforts to improve it. We even made experiments along this line and tried to patent an early diaphragm made of aluminum. Our first experiment along these lines began with the idea of cutting out the bottom of a high-priced aluminum pot, using its center point as the place to affix the stylus or vibrating metal attachment arising from the needle socket. It really worked wonders and we actually got one manufacturer interested, but by this time the Victor Orthophonic came on the market with an improved sound-box using a metal diaphragm which was rightfully regarded as a better product.

Being a record-minded child it was our custom to haunt the record shops and hear most of the new issues and to pick up gossip and chatter about the industry. It was often said in the old days, before the radio forced the record industry to tackle electrical recording, that the major recording companies had all sorts of patents to modernize and improve reproduction and equipment which had been shelved. There can be no question that the record companies held back for a

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ON LIGHT AND

HEAVY MUSIC

NEVILLE D'ESTERRE

A certain lady, not so long ago, declared it was not good for children to listen to too much heavy music, and that some recordings of light and gay tunes ought to be added to the library. She reversed the order of most fond parents, who, enjoying good music themselves, are resentful of the fact that their offspring run to light music and jazz. But many children today through music appreciation in the schools develop a taste for better music than their parents possess. As is to be expected, the lady in question explained to me that she meant classical music. So I hastened to help her out of the difficulties that threatened her, by defining classical music (for her, of course) as the kind of music, to hear which before the days of the phonograph and the radio, it was usually necessary to go to concert halls and opera houses.

This lady's own musical relations had put these ideas into her head; and she was now proclaiming that to compel her children of tender years to listen to symphonies and string quartets was like stuffing them with Greek and higher mathematics, or, in the words of her advisers, "forcing them under

glass instead of letting them grow up naturally". Such influences she argued, prompted the juvenile mind in the direction of a precocious priggery, which was bound in course of time to isolate the individual from his ordinary, everyday fellow beings.

With this side of the question I am not concerned, and deem it sufficient to observe that intellectual conceit and egotism are more often discovered in the imperfectly educated, and especially in those who are deficient in the faculty of self-education, than in those who have consorted freely with the muses from their earliest years. Culture, in this sense, is a liberating rather than a binding influence. But for the present that is neither here nor there. My concern is solely with the terminology employed by the lady.

It is the vulgarist of vulgar illusions that high art is inherently austere, overcharged with seriousness, and difficult to understand: while that kind of product in art form, which fulfills its design of achieving immediate and temporary popularity, must, by that very token, be fundamentally light, airy, gladsome and scintillating. The plain

and demonstrable truth is almost exactly the converse. The exhilarating, charming, and endearing qualities are made manifest in most instances by precisely those works of art which appeal to us at the same time by reason of the rare imagination and fine workmanship which they exhibit; and, on the other hand, the appeal of what we call popular art (which consists, in general, of art forms imperfectly conceived and given to us "in the raw") is chiefly to those people who are the least responsive to imaginative promptings, the most apt to conform to ready-made rules, the least observant of the finer shades of feeling and the niceties of craftsmanship in all things they have to handle for use of recreation. It may be that such people are in the majority; but, even if they are, that is no reason why any respect be paid to their judgments in matters which have to do, both first and last (and therefore all the time) with the recorded thoughts of a few individuals of exceptional talent and intellectual power.

I do not much like the term, classical, when it is used to describe art-music in general. It suggests a clear dividing line in musical values, a thing which does not and cannot exist. Still, it is better to call all art-music classical than to call it good or great: better, when so wide a field has a hard and fast meaning from which it cannot be twisted. If we know what we mean when we say classical music, that is sufficient. And that knowledge will assuredly show us the utter absurdity of calling such music heavy, or, in other words, stodgy and indigestible.

Here now are a few examples of the heavy, burdensome (according to the lady in question) stuff to which those unfortunate children, in their misguided innocence, were giving their frequent, and (let us confess it) willing attention:

Mozart: *Figaro* and *Così fan tutte* Overtures.

Beethoven: *Allegretto scherzando* from *Symphony No. 8*.

Weber: *Invitation to the Dance*.

Rossini: *Scala di Seta* and *Cenerentola* Overtures.

Berlioz: Excerpts from the *Damnation of Faust*.

Mendelssohn: Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Wagner: *Dance of the Apprentices* from *Die Meistersinger* and *Forest Murmurs* from *Siegfried*.

Verdi: Chorus at end of Act II, *Rigoletto*.

Rimsky-Korsakoff: *The Young Prince and Princess* from *Sheherazade*.

Chabrier: *Espana*.

Dukas: *L'Apprenti Sorcier*.

Saint-Saëns: *Le Rouet d'Omphale*.

Prokofieff: *March* from *The Love of Three Oranges*.

Not a bad list of music for young people to be absorbing, certainly a worthy list for the development of music appreciation. It may be said that all classical music is heavy. And these pieces being classical therefore are heavy. Then, in the category of heavy works of art, we must include the paintings of Franz Hals and Fragonard: and *The Three Musketeers* of Dumas, and Browning's *Pied Piper*, and (ye gods!) Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. (Oh, the heaviness of that Socratic discussion on the size and weight of aunts!). And, if these be examples of heaviness, whereby youth is tempted to embrace a premature austerity, what in the world is lightness, and in what art-works is it to be discovered?

I venture a guess that in music we find "lightness" in the military march, the work of an additional Wagner, which is known to us as *Under the Double Eagle*. One who professes to be a super-expert in matters of rhythm at various temperatures (the subtlest of which, he avers, are completely beyond my understanding) has confided to me that, in his gravely considered opinion, based on long grill-room experience, that march is "good stuff". I conclude that, even if you do not "hear the angels sing" when you listen to it, you hear the boys whistle: *vox populi*, the real thing.

Yet the mere fact that such a blatant example of unrelieved rootle-tootle as this particular piece, is thoroughly popular (and it was not composed yesterday, I heard it played in 1895) leads me to suspect that the root of the matter is not far to seek. The most obvious characteristic of music of this sort is that it limits itself to the bald statement of melodies, one after another, and that all the harmonic coloring which is given to them is not only conventional in the strictest sense, but is also entirely homophonic. For my American friends I might mention *Stars*

and *Stripes Forever*, which whistlers highly favor. And, as for vocal numbers, there are the inevitable *Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here* and *Sweet Adeline*.

Tunes thus delivered, are often accepted as good, and when, as in the typical American jazz piece, they cut across a groundwork of static harmony, they often become exciting. The intolerable thing, the thing which bewilders, and irritates, and makes you restless and uncomfortable, is polyphonic part-writing—or part-singing, particularly when we are treated to a grill-room rendition of a "light number" like *Sweet Adeline*. Of classical music polyphonic writing is the chief ingredient. "The beginning is all right," said my super expert of the *Meistersinger* Overture, "but afterwards it is nothing but a big jumble of notes." And yet to some of us so lucid is that jumble that we can visualize it in almost perfect detail of memory, without having heard it for a year or more.

Humanity in its relation to art seems to be divided like the Kiplingesque world, into an East and a West which can never meet. Assuming, then, that we are the Occidentals, we can allow the Orientals to employ any expressions they please to define their tastes to themselves. And so with the lady in question, who prompted this discourse, and her children. But for my own part a certain logic, and a certain clarity are desirable. And there is nothing more in the matter that is worth discussing.

Editorial Notes

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long time from electrical recording; the large investments in acoustic machines were probably regarded from a business standpoint as a reason for shelving more modern methods of reproduction and recording. This sort of thing has often been known to hold back big business since what would be termed "modernizing" would of necessity junk a great deal of existent equipment. It is our belief that a more modern method of recording could have been employed many years before it was and that many of the great singers of the latter part of the acoustic era might have been represented today in a

far more advantageous manner.

A great many of us conjecture on the phonograph of the future. Musical reproduction by film and wire has received a lot of publicizing, but neither of these mediums has as yet displaced the record, and it is our firm belief that they will not for a long time to come. The inequalities of wire and film are minimized by most writers, because by and large they treat their subjects as news items and not from the factual standpoint. The degree of realism attainable from a modern recording cannot be similarly obtained from any other product at this time except at a prohibitive expense in reproducing equipment. But these subjects have been previously discussed in the pages of this periodical.

Some Recent Jazz

By Lew Glane

Echoes of Harlem by Cootie Williams (Capitol 266)—on the label it says "Trumpet Solo—Cootie Williams", we think it should read "Trumpet-Solo by Harlem". Williams shows on this record that he is a musician of high standards; he pays tribute to Harlem with his interpretation of this Ellington tune. Ellington sets the mood in the arrangement, but for the trumpet solo it's Cootie's and Harlem all alone in a musical dream of splendor. On the reverse face, Eddie Vinson does the vocal of *When My Baby Left Me*. This is a blues number with tears dripping from every word of Eddie's.

High Tide by Count Basie (Columbia 36990)—from the beginning of this record we expected Benny Goodman to blow his way through with one of his terrific solos he used to play with the old Sextet Group when the Count sat in. Although not one of the best of Basie's original arrangements, there is a nice kick to this we like. The reverse is *Lazy Lady Blues*, with vocal by Jimmy Rushing—one of our favorites. He does a clean job on this *Lazy Lady Blues* (or should we say *Lady in Bed*?) Looks like Feather knows a good thing when he sees one.

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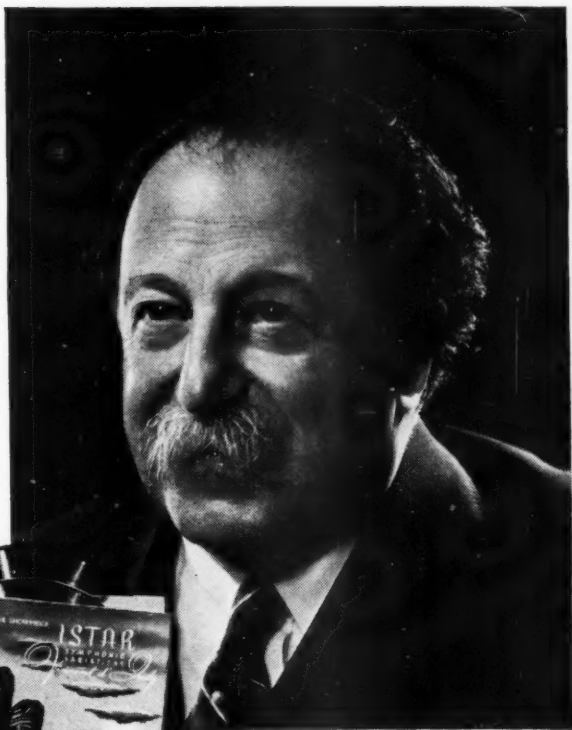
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Other New Red Seal Records

RALPH BELLAMY, Dramatic Reader: *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. With Victor Chamber Orchestra, Macklin Marrow, Conductor. Album M/DM-1055, \$3.00.

BOSTON "POPS" ORCHESTRA, Arthur Fiedler, Conductor: *Intermezzo—Provost; Brazil—Barroso*—Gould. Record 10-1219, \$.75.

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, Serge Koussevitzky, Conductor: *The Testament of Freedom*—Thompson. With the Harvard Glee Club, G. Wallace Woodworth, Choral Director. M/DM-1054, \$3.85.

Prices are suggested list prices exclusive of taxes

YEHUDI MENUHIN, Violinist: *Salut D'Amour*—Elgar; *La Fille Aux Cheveux De Lin*—Debussy. Adolph Baller at the Piano. 10-1220, \$.75.

ROBERT MERRILL, Baritone: *In the Gloaming*—Harrison; *Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes*—Jonson. With Orchestra, H. Leopold Spitalny, Conductor. Record 10-1218, \$.75.

ELEANOR STEBER, Soprano: *Summertime*—Gershwin; *Star Dust*—Carmichael. With Orchestra, Jay Blackton, Conductor. 11-9186, \$1.00.

LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI and the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra: *Solitude; Humoresque*—Tchaikovsky. Record 11-9187, \$1.00.

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RECORD NOTES AND REVIEWS

It is the purpose of this department to review monthly all worthwhile recordings. If at any time we happen to omit a record in which the reader is particularly interested, we shall be glad to give our opinion of the recording on written request. Correspondents are requested to enclose self-addressed stamped envelopes.

We believe that record buyers would do well to order by title rather than by number such items as they may wish to purchase. Numbers are sometimes printed incorrectly in our sources.

All prices given are without tax.

Record issues of the month not reviewed arrived too late for inclusion in this issue.

Orchestra

EXOTIC MUSIC: *Flamingo* (Anderson); *Poinciana* (Bernier); *Song of India* from

Sadko (Rimsky-Korsakoff); *Lotus Land* (Scott); played by André Kostelanetz and his Orchestra. Columbia set X-264, two discs, price \$2.50.

▲ The titles of albums these days are as controversial as some of the cover designs. None of this music is exotic in the strict sense of the word according to Mr. Webster; it simulates a foreign atmosphere but is not as exotic as genuine oriental music. Mr. Rimsky-Korsakoff's and Mr. Cyril Scott's familiar pieces are western imitations of oriental music, tinged with a sentiment that is spurious. Given a good looking blonde, a bottle of fine sparkling burgundy, and a delectable dish, Kostelanetz's caressing performances of these pieces would be most acceptable. They suggest low lights, the atmosphere of a mirrored night club or a yacht club veranda, couples intimately talking. As the strains of *Flamingo* die out, one can imagine the audible sighs from all corners. I recommend this album for all love-sick swains.

Undeniably, Kostelanetz is singularly adept at this sort of thing; he has a way with languishing melodies and his performances are as smooth as silk. And few would deny that he gets first-rate recording. —P.G.

FALIA: *El Amor Brujo*; Argentinita (mezzo-soprano) and the Ballet Theatre Orchestra, direction of Antal Dorati. Decca 10-inch set, three discs, price \$2.75.

▲ The death in September 1945 of Argentinita, one of the most popular dancers of the Spanish and Latin American school of our time, was both unfortunate and untimely. Singularly gifted, Argentinita sang and danced with equal success. To see her was half the attraction, for she had considerable charm and vivacity. Although she could put over a song, hers was not the most prepossessing voice for such colorful and vibrant music as this. In the recording, her dancing is conveyed by extraneous sound effects—hand-clapping, heel-tapping, and staccato castanet playing. These sounds may provide a pattern for future dancers who wish to use a similar technique in their portrayal of the gypsy heroine in this ballet, but heard without seeing the performer they are often confusing, since one cannot always be sure of the nature of the sounds or how they are being employed.

Those who knew and admired Argentinita may find this album a pleasant memento. It is her show! The orchestral part, which is as important as that of the soloist, does not begin to do justice to Falla's brilliant and colorful score. There is a looseness of direction and a lack of clarity of line and detail. The recording does not rank with the best of our time. —P.G.

IBERT: *Escales (Ports of Call)*; played by the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, direction of Artur Rodzinski. Columbia set X or MX-263, \$2.85.

▲ A gruelling way to spend an evening is to be the guinea pig of a musical test in which you are asked to listen to a number of unidentified compositions and name the nationality of each. *Escales* in such a test would pose no problem to anyone with a fairly well developed sense of musical style. This Mediterranean travelogue in music by Jacques Ibert is so obviously of the French

School. And being a piece of music directly in the Fauré-Debussy-Ravel tradition, it follows that it is a work of closely knit construction, of subtle orchestration, of stylistic refinement. Wonderful qualities in this era of musical revolution; and if one cannot claim for *Escales* daring originality or powerful impact, that is only to say that it is not a creation of great genius like *La Mer*.

An older Columbia recording of *Escales* by the Straram Orchestra of Paris was perfect in all respects except one. The recording (made at least fifteen years ago) was too muffled to bring out adequately the refulgent orchestration. It is in recording alone that this new version conducted by Rodzinski can in any way compare favorably with the old. Otherwise it is a sadly routine, provincially tasteless performance. For the extra decibels and frequencies one is forced to accept inelastic rhythm, raucous tone (especially in the important woodwind section), and unimaginative phrasing. Straram's pellucid interpretation almost makes us believe that Ibert has penned a first-rate piece of music; Rodzinski practically demotes it to the *Capriccio Italien* class. —R.G.

MOZART: *Salzburg Serenades—Concertante and Rondo from Serenade in D major K. 320, and Serenata Notturna, K. 239*; played by Vox Chamber Orchestra, direction of Edvard Fendler. Vox set 161 (automatic sequence), four 10-inch discs, price \$3.75.

▲ These wholly delightful works date from 1776 and 1779, when Mozart was under the yoke of the Archbishop of Salzburg. Salzburg in Mozart's time was a festive place, and the young composer was often called upon to write music for purely social occasions. These compositions are representative of this type of work. The difference between Mozart and so many of his contemporaries, in music of this kind, is marked, for he was not content to write superficially, even though he kept his thematic material light in quality. Inspiration, which seems to have been his to command, brought forth a melodic spontaneity and elation which bestowed a perennial freshness on such works as these, particularly whenever they are given performances as adroitly fashioned as the present ones.

Einstein speaks of "an unambitious symphonic style" in some works of this type accomplished at Salzburg, and this is noted here. The *Serenade*, K. 320 has never been represented on records before, an omission which has happily been rectified with this set. The *Concertante* is written in the manner of a concerto, since the solo woodwinds are pitted against the strings and horns. Mozart got this idea after a visit to Paris, where he heard the "the famous wind instruments and virtuoso playing of the orchestra of the 'Concerts Spirituels' ". The use of the thematic material here is pure genius. The *Rondo* is quite irresistible, buoyant and carefree—one is tempted to hum or whistle its delightful tunes at many points.

The *Serenata Notturna*, K. 239 was recorded some years ago by Boyd Neel and his String Orchestra (English Decca discs K.813/14), an attractive performance but lacking in some of the niceties of phrasing and volatility noted in the present one, although the Boyd Neel ensemble is unquestionably the better. But there is a brightness to the present recording which is in its favor. Few will deny Einstein's assertion that "from the standpoint of sound and melody" this is "one of the most enchanting of Mozart's early works". It has humor, grace and melodic buoyancy. It is based on the old concerto grosso form, being for two small orchestras", one consisting of a string quartet and the other of strings with timpani. This allows for some contrasting writing which is as effective as it is entertaining. There are three movements, a March, a Minuet, and a Rondo—the latter containing a short Adagio intermezzo. The notes with the set tell us that since the *Serenades* were frequently played at night in the open air, "the musicians entered playing the March". The effect, under such circumstances, must have been delightful, the joyous quality of the dialogue characteristics of this music might well be heightened in this type of performance.

The *Vox* concern is a new one in the record field. It uses a not inappropriate sub-title, "The Voice of the Arts", to describe its recordings. Vox's decision to engage the French conductor, Edvard Fendler, for performance of some Mozart works was a happy one. Fendler has an admirable sense of

rhythmic detail and balance, and there is a welcome spontaneity to his direction. The ensemble, obviously a small one, is evidently made up of first-rate musicians. The performance of the *Serenade*, K. 320 would seem to have had better preparation than that of the *Serenata Notturna*, but the latter has its points already mentioned. The quality of the recording is good, but suggests that it was done in a studio rather than a hall. Yet, though I would have liked more room resonance behind the orchestra—it generally does away with a tonal coarseness which a studio gives to loud, full tutti parts—I expect to enjoy these records and am most grateful to own them. —P.H.R.

PROKOFIEFF: *Overture on Hebrew Themes*, Opus 34 (Sextet:) played by William Nowinski and George Ockner (violins); Bernard Milofsky (viola); Milton Forstat (cello); David Weber (clarinet); Vivian Rivkin (piano). DISC record No. 4020, price \$1.00.

▲ Prokofieff seems to be in the limelight of late and well he may, for his is decidedly the finest musical mind in Russia. The Russians, I am sure, regard him as more cosmopolitan in his outlook than the composers who were born and trained in the Soviet school of sociology, since Prokofieff has never subordinated his individuality to any formula or pattern which would be termed in any way national. As his biographer, Nestyev, says, he has always employed material which suited his own tastes and preferences. His *Fifth Symphony* (the latest) has a universality of expression which, I believe, would make it difficult for anyone to guess the origin of the composer if they heard it without knowing whose work it was.

Of Prokofieff's many chamber compositions, the present overture has always had a wide appeal. It was written in 1919 at the insistence of a group of musicians in New York, former fellow pupils of his at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. The Jewish themes were suggested by the group, and Prokofieff is said to have been so much intrigued with them that he wrote the work in the space of two days. The overture is based on two themes, a lively dance melody and a plaintive songful one. The handling of these folk tunes is in no way pedantic; it is effective,



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fresh and harmonically cogent. This little work has always proved instantly appealing with audiences, and it seems strange that a recording of it has not been available before this in domestic catalogues. True, there was a recording (Victor disc 47167—made around 1930), but this was only available on import, since it originated in the Argentine.

The present performance would seem to have been better rehearsed than the other, but although its rhythmic impetus is admirably attained I think the dance section could have been played with more spirit. However, there is ample evidence here of good musicianship, especially on the parts of Mr. Weber and Miss Rivkin. The recording is satisfactory, but lacking in hall resonance which brightens an ensemble's tone and helps to clarify detail. It suggests a radio studio. Pressed on a plastic material, the recording is pleasantly free from surface sound.

—P.H.R.

PROKOFIEFF: *Romeo and Juliet*—Suite No. 2; played by the Moscow State Philharmonic Orchestra, direction of Sergei Prokofieff. DISC set DM-754, six discs, price \$12.50.

▲ This music comes from a ballet score, written in 1935, which takes an entire evening to present. The composer has arranged, to date, two suites for concert performance of excerpts from his ballet. In both of these, Prokofieff has not followed the order of the music in the ballet, but has shifted the various sections in order to secure contrast. This, of course, brings us music which is essentially designed for the dance along with some excerpts that by virtue of their dramatic purpose are better fitted to be heard in the concert hall.

The seven parts here are: (1) *The Montagues and the Capulets*, described in the score as "Dances of the Knights and of Juliet"; (2) *Juliet, the Maiden*; (3) *Friar Laurence*; (4) *Dance* (described in the score as "Dance of the Five Couples"); (5) *Romeo and Juliet Before Parting* (described in the score as "Romeo and Juliet's leavetaking; and Juliet's resolve to take the sleeping potion"); (6) *Dance of the Maids from the Antilles*; (7) *Romeo at Juliet's Grave*.

Three of these stand out in memory immediately Nos. 1, 2 and 7. The final section,

the *Adagio funebre*, is by far the finest part of the suite, a poetically dramatic movement of puissant strength, in which the composer lets himself go, so to speak, in his orchestration with more intensity than elsewhere in the suite. I had heard Koussevitzky play the three sections mentioned as a small scene; this may be the reason why they made a more lasting impression upon me. But I must say I was gratified to become acquainted with the entire suite through this recording for the music represents a side of Prokofieff which has proved most acceptable to the public. The style of writing here is similar in spirit to that of the *Classical Symphony*; that is to say, it is in the neo-classical vein. Two other movements of the suite have an immediate appeal: *Friar Laurence*, which obviously, and I might say successfully, aims at a type of ballet characterization of a monk (whether truly Shakespearean or not might be a moot question), and *Romeo and Juliet Before Parting*—this latter a tone poem (3 sides) wherein the plaintiveness of mood at first is dispersed by a dramatic intensity undoubtedly illustrating the agitation of the lovers. As fine as this scene is, from the records, and with all of Prokofieff's skill at orchestration, it does not completely satisfy in a recording. One is not quite sure of its interpretation, and even accepting it as music, for itself, it seems to me to ask for program clarification. *Juliet, the Maiden* is a charming bit of characterization. Of the two dance sections, the first is quite Russian in feeling and reminiscent of Stravinsky, while the second, *Dance of the Maids from the Antilles*, is quasi-oriental and reminiscent to me of Verdi. It is said to follow the presentation of pearls by Paris to Juliet, which would seem to be something Shakespeare did not have in mind.

Unquestionably, Prokofieff's *Romeo and Juliet* is more Russian than English in character. It is, however, no more alien to Shakespeare than any other musical setting of his drama. That it has none of the heart-pulling qualities of Tchaikovsky or the saccharine sentiment of Gounod is understandable, for Prokofieff has a more ironical outlook on such matters, and being modern he does not shun asperity in his musical expression. Therein lies his strength.

I wish I could report that the recording was first-rate, but in comparison to modern

American orchestral reproduction it falls short. It is obviously of the studio variety and lacks that resonating spaciousness of sound which gives realism to our own. Moreover, there is not the clarity of instrumentation at all times which some of us like. However, I find one can enjoy the music; Prokofieff's conducting is praiseworthy for its precision, balance and attention to rhythmic detail. Being familiar with Soviet recordings in their original shellac pressings, I think there is much to be said for Disc's plastic pressings, for these free the reproduction from a surface sound which can be most annoying.

The suite occupies eleven sides of the set, the twelfth being given over to a choral section, *Russian People Arise*, from the composer's cantata *Alexander Nevsky*, which is neither an imposingly sung nor as realistically recorded as in the recent Columbia set of this work.

—P.H.R.

PROVOST: *Intermezzo* (*Souvenir of Vienna*), from the United Artists film *Intermezzo*; and BARROSO (arr. Gould): *Brazil*; played by the Boston "Pops" Orchestra, direction of Arthur Fiedler. Victor 10-inch disc 10-1219, price 75c.

▲Mr. Fiedler is "in the groove" here. He handles both these pieces, which belong in the popular genre, with some deft touches that suggest he's been listening to popular bands. The ritards in *Intermezzo* are reminiscent of night club orchestras. We are reminded that the star of the film was the late Leslie Howard, who managed to give an impersonation of a violinist that was quite convincing. Some folks, I am told, refused to believe he didn't actually play the fiddle himself. Morton Gould's arrangement of *Brazil* is considerably more ornate than any we've heard by popular bands; however, it's an effective one for an orchestra like the Boston "Pops". The recording is good.

—P.G.

RODGERS: *Carousel—Waltz*; played by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, direction of Fritz Reiner. Columbia disc 12322-D, price \$1.00.

▲Here is something new in a concert waltz. One would be hard put to it to give a good

reason why the higher-classed popular music of our day should not be used on symphonic programs, just as the waltzes of Strauss have ever been, especially when we have such tunes as those which Mr. Rodgers has provided for these waltzes from *Carousel*. They are frankly just good tunes, and they are likely to have a deeper appeal than the generality of musical comedy music. Could this be a significant trend in symphonic repertoire?

The arrangement here presented is in its way an impressive job of orchestration. There is no lack of virtuoso playing, and the ensemble, while never taxing the full resources of the symphony orchestra, really "sounds". The conductor's presentation of the music may perhaps be a bit more restrained than it would be in the theatre, but this is probably another of the refinements of a concert performance. The recording is good and clear.

—P.L.M.

SOUSA: *Semper Fidelis*; and LEHAR: *Gold and Silver Waltz*; played by Sigmund Romberg and his Orchestra. Victor disc 11-9221, price \$1.00.

▲The recording is excellent. Mr. Romberg

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has a good orchestra and an admirable sense of balance and rhythm. The playing of the Sousa march may not have the virtuoso elegance of Toscanini, but it has an appropriately rousing spirit. Lehar's waltz is tuneful but rather sentimentally innocuous. Its title seems somewhat ambiguous, but for that matter so does Sousa's. I think those who like the Lehar music will find Mr. Romberg's playing of it to their liking. He has the right lilt and in view of this one feels he might be a good man to have play some of the Strauss waltzes. —P.G.

SOUSA: *Stars and Stripes Forever*; and STRAUSS, Johann, Jr.: *Tritsch-Tratsch Polka*; played by the NBC Symphony Orchestra, direction of Arturo Toscanini. Victor disc 11-9188, price \$1.00.

▲Toscanini is not only democratic in his politics, he is democratic in his musical tastes. There are those who decry his "invasions", as they put it, into the field of popular favorites, and there are those who applaud his urbanity. If one turns from the Maestro's splendid performance of the overture to Weber's *Der Freischuetz*, reviewed last month, to these performances of far lesser fare, one finds equal merit in them. Both types are encompassed with that rare sense of balanced precision, both are treated to a virtuosity of performance which Toscanini knows so well how to attain. But the accent here is on the concert hall and one questions whether these compositions are best served by such polish. The recording does full justice to the occasion. —P.H.R.

TCHAIKOVSKY (Arr. Stokowski): *Solitude*, *Opus 73*, No. 6, and *Humoresque*, *Opus 10*, No. 2; played by the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra, direction of Leopold Stokowski. Victor disc 11-9187, price \$1.00.

▲It would seem that Mr. Stokowski did not regard his previous recordings of these works with the Philadelphia Orchestra or the All American Orchestra as satisfactory. In the case of the latter this view could be understood, but in the case of the former I'm not so sure I would be in complete agreement. True, the reproduction here is more modern, but despite the fine playing of the Holly-

wood orchestra it is not, in my estimation, an organization comparable to the Philadelphia.

This is the sort of duplication that hardly seems justified. But there must be a public demand for this sort of thing, otherwise the recording companies would not permit the conductor such indulgence.

As ingenious as Stokowski's arrangements are—and it must be admitted he knows how to make symphonic transcriptions—, the question of whether the composer's intentions are best served deserves some consideration. *Humoresque* is an early piano piece, while *Solitude* is an arrangement of a song, *Weil ich wie einzamls allein*. Both of these seem destined, as far as the phonograph is concerned, to be known in transcriptions, so the question of whether Tchaikovsky is best served will be irrelevant to most record buyers. But those of us who harken back to the music of these compositions feel somewhat different about it, for there can be no denial that the conductor has added a lot of paint and powder to the contours of the original pieces. It would be idle, however, to say that Stokowski didn't succeed in attaining effects, and the fact that this disc has little inusical value to me will not deter those who have different ideas about such things from purchasing it. —P.H.R.

Concerto

MOZART: *Concerto in A major*, K. 219 (7 sides); and TARTINI: *Air from Sonata in G major*, *Opus 2* (1 side); played by Adolf Busch (violin) and the Busch Chamber Players. Columbia set M or MM-609, price \$4.85.

▲Columbia has preserved the quality of this well adjusted chamber ensemble in a manner that I find most enjoyable. There are some spots in the recording in which the tone is coarse, but these fortunately do not dominate. This is the type of small orchestra Mozart might have used in his own time, and its intimacy lends an old-world charm to the proceedings. It is all too seldom that we encounter this type of performance in the concert hall, and when we do, the size of the hall more often than not defeats its best interests.

Considering the popularity and the arresting quality of this concerto, it seems strange that no domestic recording other than the Heifetz-Barbirolli has materialized in the past decade. The latter (Victor set 254), issued in May 1935, has held an unrivalled place in domestic catalogues. The fact that this set, with its more intimate ensemble, throws a different light on the music is all to the good—indeed, it is, by and large, the set's main asset. For tonally Busch is no Heifetz; his tone is thin and often wiry, and lacking in color and expressive warmth. But stylistically Busch is in many ways more persuasive than Heifetz; his slow movement is traversed without the romantic excesses that Heifetz indulges in. Too, I like Busch's opening movement, which is more straightforward and hence more spontaneous. But one must admit that Heifetz has accomplished some of his best Mozart playing in the outer movements of this work. As in all Mozart concertos, the solo part here is mercilessly exposed and the tone quality of the soloist consequently becomes more important than in the richly scored concertos of the romantic period. This may cause some listeners to consider tonal quality before style. But in musical matters of this kind, I think that style, which is "the intimate and inseparable fact of the personality" of the creator, is more important. Moreover, despite some rough going in one or two spots, Busch gives here one of the most convincing performances he has done in recent years for the phonograph.

This concerto is not only one of Mozart's finest early works, it is a delightful and ingeniously conceived opus. Mozart was barely twenty when he wrote this, his fifth concerto for violin. It is said he composed it primarily as "a study for his own purpose," but it is hard to believe that he did not deem it worthy of greater exploitation. The opening movement, which begins with a quick tutti for the orchestra, gives way to a seven bar *Adagio* in which the composer provides one of the most arresting introductions to a solo instrument in all his concertos. The slow movement is poetic beauty of a heart-warming quality; the reflections of a maturity of mind far beyond Mozart's twenty years. The youthful élan and the Mozartean grace of the finale are irresistible and full of surprises. But most of my read-

ers doubtless do not need to be told this. One can hardly imagine a well-rounded record library without a set of this work.

The *Air* from Tartini is a well chosen encore, even though it is somewhat anticlimactic after Mozart; on its own it is an ingratiating little piece. —P.H.R.

Keyboard

GRIEG: *Album Leaf, in A major, Opus 28, No. 3, and Berceuse, Opus 38, No. 1*; played by Harold Bauer (piano). Victor 10-inch disc 10-1217, price 75c.

▲ The recording is at a lower level than in most modern piano discs, and one is thus made aware of some surface, although it can be said the disc we heard was smooth

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enough. The tone of the piano seems a bit thin, but Bauer manages to obtain considerable coloring in his playing. There is a sort of caressing quality to Bauer's performances of these lyrical morceaux, he does not strive to make them something they are not, and this adds to one's enjoyment of his playing. Grieg was a miniaturist, and these pieces are musical cameos, unpretentious and melodically gracious, with the faint sweet quality of garden perennials. I think students of the piano will derive a lot from Bauer's performances, although whether the modern teacher will approve of all of his ritards is open to conjecture. But Bauer is ever the discriminating musician in matters of this kind.

—P.G.

CHOPIN: *Fantasia Impromptu, Opus 66; Nocturne in E flat, Opus 9, No. 2; Waltz in C sharp minor, Opus 64, No. 2; Polonaise in A flat, Opus 53; Revolutionary Etude, Opus 10, No. 12; and Mazurka in B flat, Opus 24, No. 4*; played by Jacob Gimpel (piano). Vox set 604, four 10-inch discs, price \$3.75.

▲Vox is not taking any chances in this Chopin album; each of the selections is tried and true, also, each has been recorded many times before, though some are difficult to obtain now.

Gimpel is a pianist to be treated with respect. Some years ago he made for Columbia twelve etudes by Szymanoski (Set X-189, now withdrawn), in which he displayed brilliant pianism. His work here is also of a high order, though it is not exactly my type of Chopin. It is very accurate, but, in my opinion, it has its drawbacks, notably evidenced in a lack of true legato. Gimpel plays scales in a "detached" fingering which is neat, accurate, and tends toward a jerkiness in style. Judging from his Columbia album, his best medium would appear to lie in the rhythmic and percussive complexities of modern music. Vox would do well to record him in some modern music.

The best playing occurs in the overworked *Polonaise*, where Gimpel achieves more sweep than is encountered elsewhere. Outside of a few dropped notes in the octave passages, his technique encompasses all, and he refuses to sentimentalize, playing with spirit. There is spirit too in the

Revolutionary Etude, but the fussy treatment of the left-hand runs makes it too professorial and, again, jerky. His incidentally is the only recorded version, as far as I know, that uses the underlocked-octave ending popularized by Taussig. All of the other pieces are played with intelligence. The *Mazurka* (mislabelled on cover; the disc is correct) and *Nocturne* are examples of sincere musicianship. While I do not think his playing on the whole has the spontaneity and subtlety that Chopin demands, Gimpel is too good an artist to be dismissed on purely personal theories.

The reproduction here is not too good. Two sets were played. In one the scratch level spoiled the playing, in the other it was superior in this respect. The listener had best make certain he gets a good pressing before purchasing. The reproduction lacks, even at its best, overtones, suggesting it was made in a studio.

—H.C.S.

Violin

ELGAR: *Salut d'amour, Opus 12*; and DEBUSSY: *La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin*; played by Yehudi Menuhin (violin), with Adolph Baller at the piano. Victor 10-inch disc 10-1220, price 75c.

▲These are encore pieces, too familiar by now to require extended comment. The Elgar composition was originally written for violin and piano, but the Debussy one is his twelfth prelude from Book I for piano. The name of the arranger is not given, but this is of small moment, for no arrangement of this prelude for violin and piano has quite the charm and sweetness that we get from the piano alone. The violin at times seems obtrusive, too pronounced in its melodic contours, which on the piano blend so nicely into the harmonies. The Elgar composition has suffered a lot of disparagement but it still appeals to many. It is really quite unpretentious, simply a sentimentally innocuous mood which the composer wisely kept within its bounds.

Menuhin plays the Elgar in a straightforward manner which is all to the good, and his Debussy is happily free of tonal and expressive excesses which others indulge in.

The accompaniments of Mr. Baller are on the discreet side; the focus is on the violinist. The recording is good, but I would have liked a little more piano. —P.G.

Voice

GERSHWIN: *Summertime* from *Porgy and Bess*; and CARMICHAEL: *Star Dust*; sung by Eleanor Steber, soprano, with orchestra, direction of Jay Blackton. Victor disc 11-9186, price \$1.00.

▲After having had in the Army what may be modestly described as an overdose of *Star Dust*, which is inevitably in the repertoire of every jazz band or vocalist performing for the soldiers, I must confess that I approached this disc with something less than immoderate enthusiasm. Even now, for all the purity of Miss Steber's tone and the excellence of her diction, I can hardly say that I have been entirely won over to Hoagy Carmichael's popular masterpiece. There is little that can be said against the performance, which for its simplicity and modestly distinguished approach reminds me of the many records of popular songs made by the late John McCormack—but the song is still *Star Dust*.

Turning the disc over, however, I come to a different story. Here everything clicks. Miss Steber is at her tonal loveliest; the melody is one of Gershwin's best; and the accompanying orchestra, with its long and elaborate introduction, is thoroughly competent and excellently recorded. There is something in the soprano's way of breathing into her high tones which is electrifying to say the least. *Summertime* is well worth the price of this disc. And it is altogether likely that not everyone feels the way I do about *Star Dust*. —P.L.M.

HARRISON: *In the Gloaming*; and OLD ENGLISH AIR: *Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes*; sung by Robert Merrill (baritone), with orchestra, direction of H. Leopold Spitalny. Victor ten-inch disc 10-1218, price 75c.

▲Last month I had occasion to admire the voice of Robert Merrill in Verdian melody;

now here it is in two old familiar songs. In this day of sweet orchestrations (to borrow a term from the popular field) such arrangements as these are the rule rather than the exception. Therefore it can be simply stated that your interest in this disc will be determined by your preference for the simple or for the brilliantly colorful. Mr. Merrill's voice needs no praise—its richness and roundness have been remarked before. He is not, however, as much at ease in these songs as he appears to be in the opera. His otherwise clear diction is marred, especially in *In the Gloaming*, by a curious lack of final t's. —P.L.M.

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LOVE SONGS—*Traditional Folk Songs*; sung by Richard Dyer-Bennet. Disc Set 609, three 10-inch discs, price \$3.15.

▲ Folk songs dealing with the theme of love are generally in the first person singular, as though the singer were relating an amorous adventure of his own. This is one of the attractive features of this kind of folk song for it gives the singer an opportunity to convey a touch of humor or to project a bit of sentiment in a personal manner. Dyer-Bennet has a gift for this sort of thing, and sufficient imagination to point up songs of this character. He has, of course, been pursuing a more eclectic course than most folk singers, since he has sung in night clubs and other places where tradition would be less apt to fill the bill.

It is most gratifying to find Dyer-Bennet including here that lovely British folk air, *Brigg Fair*, which inspired Delius to write one of the greatest orchestral rhapsodies of all time. I have long cherished an English recording of the choral version of this song made by Percy Grainger, and the solo version of the present singer will be, I feel certain, equally cherished. The songs here are: *Two Maid Went Milking One Day* (an 18th-century English ballad), *Westron Wynde* (from 16th-century England, and reminiscent, as the annotator says, of the old troubadour songs); *Brigg Fair*; *Blow the Candles Out* (English—dating from late 17th century); *As I Was Going to Ballynure* (an Irish ballad, collected by Herbert Hughes, which the late John McCormick made popular); and *Venezuela* (a delightful song collected by John Jacob Niles).

Dyer-Bennet has a style which is deceptively unstudied. This sort of artistry is of course the result of patient preparation and of soaking up the mood of a song until it is inseparable from the singer's personality. Good diction, which is essential to the enjoyment of such material, is one of Dyer-Bennet's virtues, yet his personalized pronunciation often takes on a curiously nasal quality that is not always pleasant, particularly in full-toned passages. I have always admired his soft singing—the mood he conveys by subtle tonal effects as in the all-too-short *Westron Wynde* and the last verse of *Briggs Fair*. His use of his lute-like instrument is another commendable point of

his artistry; it is always discreet and seems to furnish the right pivotal point for his voice.

The recording has an intimacy which is appropriate. But I, for one, would have liked a little room resonance behind the singer; it helps distinguish a recording from the studio sound of most radio broadcasts.

—P.H.R.

MILHAUD: *Cinq Chansons (for Children)*. *Les Quatre Petits Lions*; *La Pomme et l'Escargot*; *Le Malpropre*; *Poupette et Patata*; *Le Jardinier Impatient*; sung by Verna Osborne (soprano), with piano accompaniments by Lukas Foss. Hargail set HN 650, two ten-inch discs, price \$2.50.

▲ The recording of these charming children's songs of Milhaud was a happy inspiration on the part of Hargail, for they are as unhackneyed as they are attractive. Each tells a little story, or fable, in a delightfully childish way, and the tunes are melodious, rhythmic and very French. The first of them especially has the quality of an old *Noël*, but it has at the same time a modern spice. Miss Osborne sings the songs with good spirit, but in a voice which is inclined to be rather thin and uneven, and with diction which is not of the clearest. Fortunately the records are accompanied by a good leaflet giving the original French words and an English summary of their meaning, and by this means we are able to follow the stories which are told in the songs. In the case of *Le Malpropre*, which is abridged in the recording, we are given more words to read than Miss Osborne sings. The piano accompaniments of Lukas Foss are weakly recorded, but they are well with the singer.

—P.L.M.

Lauritz Melchior in Songs from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's film *Two Sisters from Boston*, and *The House I Live In* (Earl Robinson) and *Serenade from The Student Prince* (Romberg); with Nadine Connor (soprano), chorus and orchestra. Victor 10-inch set DM-1056, three discs, price \$3.00.

▲ There can be no question that Mr. Melchior fits into the movie world as well as any operatic star who has gone to Hollywood. But it seems to me that Hollywood does not

know how to do justice to him, as the two heterogeneous opera sequences taken from the picture and recorded here with Nadine Connor prove. Both are musical hash of excerpts from Liszt and Mendelssohn. Maybe they aren't so bad in the picture, but not having seen it I cannot say. One opera sequence, called *My Country*, is based on Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 14* and the ubiquitous *Liebestraum*. The other opera sequence, called *Marie Antoinette*, is based on Mendelssohn's *War March of the Priests* and the slow movement from his *Violin Concerto*. Melchior seems to enjoy the proceedings hugely for he sings with fervor and assurance. To achieve these amazing arrangements of supposed opera, Hollywood had to enlist the services of several people—which suggests too many cooks. Too bad that Liszt and Mendelssohn weren't protected by copyright from this sort of thing.

For good measure, Mr. Melchior adds *The House We Live In* and the *Serenade from The Student Prince*, which are not sung in the film. Here are more genuine musical numbers and Melchior's singing is assuredly more applaudable. The recording is top-drawer Victor. —P.G.

SPIRITUALS: *Go Down, Moses* (Arr. H. T. Burleigh); *Balm in Gilead* (Arr. H. T. Burleigh); *By an' By* (Arr. H. T. Burleigh); *Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child* (Arr. L. Brown); *John Henry* (Arr. Hall Johnson); *Water Boy* (Robinson); *Nobody Knows de Trouble I've Seen* (Arr. L. Brown); *Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho* (Arr. L. Brown); sung by Paul Robeson (bass-baritone), with piano accompaniments by Lawrence Brown. Columbia set M-160, four ten-inch discs, price \$3.50.

▲ The voice of Paul Robeson is one of the richest and noblest given to our generation, and there is a powerful simplicity about the man which disarms all criticism. There was a time when he gave more of his energies to the singing of spirituals, and it may be with a touch of nostalgia that he returns at the height of his dramatic career to these songs of his people which are so much a part of his background. And it is interesting to us to compare, by means of these records and those he made for Victor in the middle twenties, the great voice of the celebrated

actor with that of the recitalist who used to be so familiar to us. There is no question that the Robeson of *Othello* is a more towering artist than was the singer of spirituals, but it seems to me that his very rise in the world of sophisticated art has taken away something of the direct expressiveness which we can still experience in the earlier recordings. The voice today is less rich and smooth, less even and less fervent than it used to be. On the other hand there are points of phrasing which constitute a definite improvement. The diction is, as ever superb, and this very fact draws attention to a couple of alterations which he has made in the texts of two of the most familiar of the songs. Personally I cannot but regret these changes, which alter the religious character of the spirituals. A point has been stretched by the inclusion of *John Henry* and *Water*

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Boy in this collection of religious songs, but they will be appreciated along with the others, and *John Henry* especially is a distinguished tune.

Lawrence Brown is at the piano as in the old days, and even today he occasionally lifts his voice in harmony or antiphony with Mr. Robeson. Perhaps the very size and roundness of the Robeson voice makes the recording of piano accompaniments difficult—in any case the instrument sounds a little weak, though it is played with all of Mr. Brown's old enthusiasm. —P.L.M.

THOMPSON: *The Testament of Freedom*; performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Harvard Glee Club, direction of Serge Koussevitzky. Victor album M or DM 1054, three discs, price \$3.85.

▲ Randall Thompson belongs to what may be called the "second generation" of American composers along with such figures as Walter Piston and Aaron Copland. Thompson was born in New York City of New England parents and was educated at Harvard. He studied with Ernest Bloch in the years 1920-1921, and has been the recipient of an American Academy Fellowship as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship. He is at present a member of the music faculty at the University of Virginia.

Thompson has long been considered one of the outstanding of contemporary choral composers. In his recent book *The Technique of Choral Composition*, Dr. Archibald T. Davison, himself a former conductor of the Harvard Glee Club, had this to say in his dedication: "To Randall Thompson, first among our native composers in the art of choral writing." Considering this, it is strange that *The Testament of Freedom* is the first of Thompson's choral compositions to reach records. The work by which Thompson probably is best known is his *Symphony No. 2 in E Minor*, which Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra recorded for Victor in 1940 but which never was released.

Olin Downes wrote in the New York Times the day following the New York premiere of *The Testament of Freedom*: "Mr. Thompson has written a composition of astonishing simplicity, appropriateness and effect. He has produced what amounts to a choral symphony in four movements, and one

which made a profound impression on the audience."

Downes goes on to say how admirably proportioned the work is, how it does not "sag or falter in its progress", how well it is written vocally, and how admirably the orchestral part achieves both "coloristic and dramatic effects". The test of Thomas Jefferson used is not in the strict sense poetry, and the fact that Thompson supplies musical patterns that fit the words like the proverbial glove bespeaks his skill and ingenuity. Mr. Downes' contention that this work is "one of the most convincing American scores that this period has produced" is a viewpoint I share. Also, I agree with the eminent critic that "Thompson has not written as a sensationalist or a patrioter, but as a thoughtful and modest artist, seeking for the right notes to communicate something, profoundly of his people, that was in his heart."

The present recording was made a few weeks before VE-Day, at a time when the personnel of the Harvard Glee Club was still suffering from the inroads made upon it by the Armed Forces. Especially noticeable is the comparatively small amount of bass voices. Yet, the performance by this amateur chorus is one which would do credit to any of the larger, pre-war Harvard Glee Clubs. Koussevitzky is very fond of this score, and he apparently transmitted much of his enthusiasm for it to the orchestra as well as the chorus. The enunciation of the singers might have been a bit more distinct in the two middle movements, but this is a minor criticism. Praise is due G. Wallace Woodworth, conductor of the Harvard Glee Club, who prepared the chorus for the recording. The Boston Symphony is at its accustomed best and the recording is splendidly realized.

This set wins my unqualified approval and I heartily recommend it to all.

—Martin Bookspan

WAGNER: *Lohengrin*—*Einsam in trüben Tagen*; sung by Helen Traubel (soprano), with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, direction of Artur Rodzinski. Columbia disc 12321-D, price \$1.00.

▲ As if asking me to reconsider my remarks of last month in regard to Miss Traubel's

greater suitability to the roles of Bruennhilde and Isolde than to that of Elsa, Columbia here presents the distinguished soprano in her version of the famous dream narrative from the first act of Wagner's opera. This passage, to be sure, has in it more of the heroic than does Elsa's part in the *Bridal Chamber Scene*, and one is less conscious of the alleged miscasting perhaps because practically every Wagnerian soprano since *Lohengrin* was written has been heard in this scene if not in the complete opera. Ideally speaking Elsa should even here be maidenly, though a good voice and musical intelligence will suffice to carry the day. These qualities Miss Traubel assuredly has.

This is not the soprano's first essay at *Elsas Traum* on records. It was included among her first selections for Victor in the days before she had achieved all of her present fame as a heroic singer. It is not to be denied that the voice at that time was younger and the intonation a bit purer than today: the compensation is in the greater surety and poise of her present style. She has departed from tradition in her latest release by running the scene over to two record sides, which gives her time for all the spaciousness she wants in her interpretation and also allows for an extended prelude and postlude. As a recording the new Columbia version is preferable because it is better balanced and because of the superiority of the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra under Dr. Rodzinski's experienced leadership.

—P.L.M.

Recitation

FITZGERALD: *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, with musical background by Henry S. Gerstlé; recited by Ralph Bellamy, with Victor Chamber Orchestra, direction of Macklin Marrow. Victor set M-1055, two discs, price \$2.50.

▲ The *Rubáiyát* was an inevitable choice for the growing lists of recorded poetry, and it is therefore no surprise that Victor follows up the successful *Leaves of Grass* album of Ralph Bellamy with the Fitzgerald poem in the voice of the same reader. I suppose this type of set has tremendous value to teachers

of English, who can now bring their pupils not only the poetry itself, but that poetry in the voice and inflections of some of our most celebrated actors. But the greatest appeal of such records, after all, will probably be to those who remember these pithy verses from their school days and who can now come back to them without even the effort required to read so long a poem as the *Rubáiyát*.

But there is another feature of this new set, for it is more than recited poetry—it is melodrama in the old and true sense of the word. That is to say, the poem is recited against a musical background which is continuous throughout the four record sides. This musical background is of especial interest to readers of this magazine, as the composer is none other than our old friend Henry S. Gerstlé. He has not attempted to create a symphonic work which might be taken away from its association with the poetry and played by itself, but rather he has provided, unobtrusively, an accompaniment of Oriental atmosphere and color. He has used the instruments of his orchestra skilfully, and there are occasional pleasant bursts of Eastern melody. Mr. Bellamy gives a virile reading of the quatrains, albeit with a characteristic regional accent, making

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no attempt at dramatic or striking effects or contrasts, but rather choosing to make his points by straightforward inflections. He has changed the order of the verses to keep a more continuous building up of the essential thought and philosophy of the poem, and he has made some omissions. The poem is a long one to be read in this manner, but it is, of course, as full of "quotations" as *Hamlet*.

The recording of the musical score has been particularly well accomplished, for the orchestral qualities are always present and always distinct, yet the music is quite properly subordinated to the poem. —P.L.M.

Some Recent Jazz

(Continued from page 323)

Whatta Ye Gonna Do by Billy Butterfield (Capitol 265)—Allen Wylie does a straight vocal on this straight ballad with Billy backing up sweetly on his solid horn. Disc also includes *Billy the Kid*, with Butterfield trumpeting some wonderful solos.

The House of Blue Lights (Capitol 251) by Freddie Slack with Rhythm Section—Here is a platter we've long been wanting to say something about. Ella Mae Morse seems at her best; she has a beat that blends in beautifully with Slack and his rhythm men. Although we like Slack, we have a feeling that he might be without Ella somewhat of a "Sad Slack". *Hey Mister Postman* is the backing with Ella stealing the show again—what a beat, and what a gal!

Four Months, Three Weeks, Two Days, One Hour Blues by Stan Kenton (Capitol 250)—They told us long ago to watch Stan Kenton and his gang. We have, we are, and we'll listen for all of four months and the rest of the count if all of his records are as good as this one, and with June Christy doing the vocals. Reverse: *Painted Rhythm*, a good Ree-Boop tune.

Lil Augie Is a Natural Man by Johnny Mercer (Capitol 254)—and so is old man Mercer. Here's a musician that knows the music and what's more knows how to play it. Mercer sings natural; he's easy and pleasing to listen to on the right tunes, and this *Lil Augie* is a right tune for him, and for us too. On the reverse face, Mercer warbles through *Any Place I Hang my Hat*.

Dots My Baby by Guarneri Quartet (H.N. Society Disc 101—for a good jump record hear this waxing by Guarneri at his best. For a good measure, we have on the other side Ellington's *Sophisticated Lady*. The Guarneri Quartet have also waxed *I'd Do Something for You* and *Armand the Groove* on H. N. Society Disc 102.

Get Your Kick on Route 66 by King Cole Trio (Capitol 256)—Ol' King Cole turns in a typical top flight singing job on this familiar tune. Nat goes all out on the piano with some sparkling accompaniment. Reverse brings us *Everyone is saying Hello Again*. Here, we have a smooth dance tempo. Oscar Moore's superb guitar stands out in front; his artistry deserves all the honors the critics have given him.

Seems Like Old Times by Bobby Sherwood (Capitol 257)—with Bobby doing the vocal and playing his golden trumpet, how can he miss? Reverse face brings us *I Fall in Love with You Every Day*, with Joy Herbert Johnson doing a vocal on a sentimental tune that will be welcomed by all who like songs with a strong romantic appeal.

Of four Musicraft records we have on the machine, the best by far is *Babalu* by Miguelito Valdes (disc 362). You all know his stuff and since the recording is good, that's nuff said. The backing is *Rumba Rhapsody* which features Walter Gross on the piano. The other three records are *Two Hearts are Better than One* and *The Right Romance* by Louame Hogan (disc 356); *Prisoner of Love* and *They Say it's Wonderful* by Gordon MacRae (disc 15065); and, *Love on a Greyhound Bus* and *All the Time* with Orrin Tucker (disc 15064). Take your pick among your favorites.

For cowboy music Capitol has waxed *I'm gonna leave you like I found you* and *Long Time Gone* by Tex Ritter (disc 253). This sort of thing isn't our meat.

Finally there's a good Roy Rogers (Victor disc 20-1782)—*You Can't Break my Heart* and *You Should Know*. There's more to come, but pops don't arrive as quickly as they should—in fact several albums came in which we've long awaited, but unfortunately too late for copy this month.

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THE MUSICAL QUARTERLY

PAUL HENRY LANG, Editor

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